



AMBS window

Summer 2024 | Volume 34, Issue 2

Follow Jesus' leadership model, Okanya tells seminary grads

During AMBS's April 27 Commencement Service, **Nelson Okanya**, DIS, urged the Class of 2024 to adopt Jesus' model of "serving leadership."

The commencement speaker addressed an audience of approximately 180 people at the service — including 15 of the 22 members of the graduating class. The event was held in the Elkhart, Indiana, seminary's Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount and was also livestreamed.

Focusing on John 13:3-17 — the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet and his accompanying conversation with Simon Peter — Okanya asked, "How does the serving leader lead?"

"The accusation is that if you're a serving leader, you're a doormat and people can just walk over you," he said. "We don't see that in this text, though. We see Jesus doing something very different. He leads while serving Peter; he serves while leading Peter. He does not get out of the [leadership] role."

In his address, Okanya — who is from Nairobi, Kenya, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania — drew from Scripture, biblical scholarship, leadership theory and his personal experiences as a consultant to

pastoral, business, civic, military and government leaders in Africa, Asia and the United States. He is President of World Serving Leaders, the nonprofit division of the Center for Serving Leadership in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Chair of the Global Mission Fellowship, a global network facilitated by Mennonite World Conference.

Jesus draws his people into a new reality, an alternative narrative that turns leadership upside down.

In exploring how leaders can lead change to benefit their communities, Okanya contrasted leadership motivated by self-interest with leadership that serves others. He noted that during the Passover, when the Jewish people remembered their liberation from slavery, Jesus invited his disciples into an intimate space and did what would have seemed unthinkable: he washed their feet.

"Jesus draws his people into a new reality, an alternative narrative that turns leadership upside down," Okanya said. "As I travel around the world, I've seen people who get into positions of leadership say, 'It's our time to eat.' But no, it's your time to serve — with service that is motivated by love. Jesus loved his own, and knowing his love for the people he served, he laid down his life for them."

(continued on p. 2)

Above: Nelson Okanya, DIS, delivers the commencement address. Behind Okanya are David Boshart, PhD (at left), AMBS President; and Beverly Lapp, EdD, AMBS Vice President and Academic Dean.

(continued from p. 1)

No self-interest but humble service shaped his practice of leadership.”

Okanya described how underlying assumptions that are present in each culture shape how people perceive and understand their contexts and remember history — both individually and collectively. These assumptions also influence which leadership frameworks people will accept, he said.

“Jesus loved his own, and knowing his love for the people he served, he laid down his life for them. No self-interest but humble service shaped his practice of leadership.”

To lead change, leaders need to understand the underlying assumptions of the culture in which they’re serving. In setting the example of washing his disciples’ feet, Jesus knew he was challenging cultural practices and assumptions — reversing the practice of leadership from “being served” to “serving,” Okanya noted.

He gave an example of how assumptions and narratives grounded in colonial history “that reject Africa itself”

have shaped conflicts and leadership frameworks in African nation-states. He quoted Ugandan priest Emmanuel Katongole, who wrote in *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Eerdmans, 2010) that a new future in Africa “requires much more than strategy and skills ... it requires a different story that assumes the sacred value and dignity of Africa and Africans, and is thus able to shape practices and policies, or new forms of politics, that reflect this sacredness and dignity.”

This type of new story, one “that forms and shapes people’s memories and how people think

and perceive reality,” is what Jesus models in John 13, Okanya said.

“How are you going to approach leadership?” he asked the graduates. “Jesus showed us a model. It is a costly model, and we’ve seen leaders who have followed it — Dr. Martin Luther King, Father Romero in El Salvador. But you’re not alone. Jesus is with us.”

After the graduates received their degrees and certificates, **Rachel Miller Jacobs**, DMin, Associate Professor of Congregational Formation, gave a prayer of blessing for the graduating class. She spoke each graduate’s name, entrusting them to God’s care.

“Bless them so thoroughly that they can never go where your blessing is not, so that when their sense of themselves as leaders feels tentative

or uncertain, you will draw them near to the One who rightly claimed the authority you gave,” she prayed, “and when they are tempted by authoritarianism, no matter how subtle, you will draw them near to the One who stooped to serve. Bless and strengthen them for the paradoxical leadership this world so desperately needs.”

A video of the service is available at ambs.edu/graduation. • — Annette Brill Bergstresser

“Bless them so that when their sense of themselves as leaders feels tentative or uncertain, you will draw them near to the One who rightly claimed the authority you gave.”

AMBS Window Summer 2024

Volume 34, Issue 2

Distributed two times a year as a supplement to *Anabaptist World* and *Canadian Mennonite*.

Editors: Annette Brill
Bergstresser, Melissa Troyer
Designer: Rachel A. Fonseca
Commencement photographer:
Jason Bryant

**Anabaptist Mennonite
Biblical Seminary**
3003 Benham Avenue
Elkhart, IN 46517, USA
574.295.3726 • contact@ambs.edu



A seminary of
Mennonite Church USA and
Mennonite Church Canada

MKS honors second Ethiopian MATGA cohort

Five AMBS graduates made up the second cohort of Ethiopian students to complete the **MA: Theology and Global Anabaptism** (MATGA) entirely from Ethiopia through a partnership between AMBS and **Meserete Kristos Seminary** (MKS: Ethiopian Mennonite Seminary) in Bishoftu/Debre Zeit that began in 2019. The partnership is helping meet a need to prepare and equip theologically grounded leaders for the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) — the largest national body in the global Anabaptist family.

The MATGA graduates were honored along with 79 undergraduate MKS graduates during MKS’s May 18

Commencement Service in the seminary’s Multipurpose Hall. In his commencement address, Pastor **Desalegn Abebe**, MKC President, challenged the graduates to apply what they have learned when faced with challenges, drawing from Mark 4:35-41, where Jesus calms the storm. He reminded them that God’s power is always there to help them when they face challenges and difficulties in ministry. He also encouraged them to remember that the storms and challenges of life can make them stronger and help them to know Jesus and that Christians need to pay attention to the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit in their day-to-day life. • — *Henok T. Mekonen, MA, Global Leadership Collaborative Specialist*

Meet our new graduates!

Each graduate received one of the following degrees or certificates at AMBS's April 27 Commencement Service.

MACF Master of Arts in Christian Formation

MATGA Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism

MATGA

Ethiopia Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism: Ethiopian cohort (partnership with Meserete Kristos Seminary)

MATPS Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies

MDiv Master of Divinity

GCSD Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction

GCTS Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies

* Candidates who have six or fewer credits left to complete toward their degree

► Candidates who completed part or all of their degree or certificate at a distance



► **Addiskidan Getachew**

Abreham, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Addiskidan plans to continue serving in Addis Ababa as Director of the Great Commission Ministry of

Athletes in Action. She also serves in her community as a counselor and gospel singer, and in her home congregation — Anointed Word of God Church — as a Bible study leader.



► **Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew**,

Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Endaweke plans to continue serving as Assistant Professor of Law at Dire Dawa University and in the Meserete Kristos Church, teaching peace in these roles as well as in his community. He also wants to pursue a PhD in theology and peace. His home congregation is Meserete Kristos Church of Dire Dawa.

I have gone through an experience of growth at AMBS, with its integrated teaching of theology, peace, leadership and research by renowned professors. — Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew



*► **Israel Tesfaye Berhe**, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Israel plans to continue as Lead Pastor of West Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church.



► **Deborah J. Coates**, Albany, Oregon; *GCTS*. Deb's home congregation is Portland (Oregon) Mennonite Church.

(continued on p. 4)



The five graduates in the second MATGA Ethiopia cohort (l. to r.): Dirriba Amenu Sori, Aschalew Assefa Fikadu, Israel Tesfaye Berhe, Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew and Addiskidan Getachew Abreham. (Photo provided)



The MATGA Ethiopia graduates pose with AMBS Teaching Faculty who represented AMBS at the Commencement Service (l. to r.): Joe Liechty, PhD, Visiting Professor of Peace Studies; Sori; Berhe; Abreham; Drew Strait, PhD, Associate Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins and MATGA Program Director; Balkew and Fikadu. (Photo provided)



The members of the Class of 2024 who were present for the April 27 Commencement Service.

(continued from p. 3)



*> **Alaina Dobkowski**, Grand Rapids, Michigan; *MDiv: Pastoral Ministry*. Alaina plans to continue serving as Pastor of Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship and working with anti-racism organizing and education.



*> **Misgana Alemayehu Eshete**, Asebe Teferi/Chiro, Ethiopia; *MACF*. Misgana plans to further her education in counseling. Her home congregation is Meserete Kristos Church in Asebe Teferi/Chiro; locally, she has attended Pleasant View Church in Goshen, Indiana.

“It was transformative to be on this journey with fellow seminarians from diverse backgrounds, cultures and faith traditions around the world. We challenged each other, stretched our minds and grew together in wisdom and knowledge.

— Misgana Alemayehu Eshete



*> **Aschalew Assefa Fikadu**, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Aschalew is serving as Pastor at Bethel Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church and hopes to carry on the gospel work with his denomination in the future. He would like to pursue a PhD in peace studies.



*> **Isaiah Friesen**, Saint Paul, Minnesota; *MDiv: Theological Studies: Peace Studies*. Isaiah plans to seek work in ministry, higher education or the non-profit sector in Minnesota. His home congregations are First Mennonite Church of Beatrice (Nebraska) and Paoli (Indiana) Mennonite Fellowship; locally, he has attended and served as an intern at Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, and Belmont Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

In my favorite course, *Earthkeeping*, Malinda [Berry] facilitated really amazing learning opportunities among an incredibly international and intercultural group of both online and in-person students.

— Isaiah Friesen



William David Funk, Elkhart, Indiana; *MDiv: Theological Studies: History, Theology and Ethics*. Billy will continue in pastoral ministry at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana.



*> **Colleen Avilla Geier**, upstate New York and South Bend, Indiana; *GCTS*. Colleen plans to continue teaching Sign Language Interpreting at Goshen (Indiana) College and to continue her studies in a master's program at AMBS. She also serves on the board of and as a volunteer for Luvability Ministries — an organization in Niles, Michigan, for adults living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her home congregation is St. Peter's United Church of Christ in South Bend.



> **Elia Gisselle Guity**, West Palm Beach, Florida; *GCTS*. Gisselle is combining her Master of Social Work, her AMBS studies and her 15 years of experience as a therapist to serve her community through

Studying at AMBS provided a solid foundation for my journey into ministry, and the encouragement I received continues to inspire me in my calling. — Gisselle Guity

pastoral counseling and church planting. In Florida, she is part of Centro Adoración Refugio Eterno in Palm Springs; locally, she has attended College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana.



Janeth Magiri, Mugumu-Serengeti, Mara Region, Tanzania; *MACF*. Janeth plans to do a one-year Optional Practical Training assignment in the United States and then return to Tanzania.



*> **Carrie A. Mast**, Bluffton, Ohio; *GCTS*. Carrie plans to continue serving as Associate Pastor of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton.

“Choosing courses that supported my work in the church meant that I was able to immediately apply what I was learning in my studies to my church work. — Carrie Mast



> **Matthew Peterson**, Columbiana, Ohio; *MDiv: Pastoral Ministry*. Matthew plans to continue serving as Pastor of Midway Mennonite Church in Columbiana.



*> **Christina Rhebergen**, Vandalia, Michigan; *GCSD*. Christina has started the company Present Spiritual Direction to help people explore

My courses not only provided me with information, tools and resources, but also created environments that took the student as seriously as the studies. — Christina Rhebergen

and grow in faith through spiritual direction and other practices. Her home congregation is Church of the Savior CRC (Christian Reformed Church) in South Bend, Indiana. She is the first student to complete this new certificate program.



> **Betelehem Zeleke Roba**, Mojo, Oromia, Ethiopia; *MATGA*. Betelehem plans to continue preaching the gospel of peace in her ministry as a preacher. She currently works as a Medical Laboratory

Technologist at the Mayo Clinic Hospital in Minnesota. In the future, she would like to work for peace in Ethiopia. Her home congregation is Mojo Meserete Kristos Church.

Coming to AMBS has been a window of opportunity opened to the world of theology and peace studies. Definitely, I am leaving AMBS a changed man, grown and equipped to serve beyond what used to be my comfort zone. — Ndunge Sefu



Ndunge A. Sefu, Table View, Cape Town, South Africa; *MATPS*. Ndunge is ready to enter whatever door the Lord may open for him as a theologian and peacemaker, whether it be in pastoral ministry or a

Christian agency or organization. His home congregations are Paroisse Missionnaire de Kintambo (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Table View Baptist Church of Cape Town. Locally, he attends Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart.

(continued on p. 6)

Graduates receive awards

AMBS Teaching Faculty members presented awards to selected candidates for graduation at the Dean's Luncheon on April 26. This year's recipients:

- **Endaweke Tsegaw Balkew**: Award for Excellence in Missional Leadership
- **Alaina Dobkowski**: Award for Excellence in Biblical Interpretation
- **Isaiah Friesen**: Award for Excellence in Theological Studies

- **Talashia Keim Yoder**: Award for Excellence in Christian Formation

All graduates received two issues of *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* from the Institute of Mennonite Studies; access to a religion database from the AMBS Library; a \$100 gift certificate from the Church Leadership Center to go toward registration for a lifelong learning event of their choice in 2025; and an Admissions Application fee waiver to share with a prospective student. ●

2024 COMMENCEMENT

(continued
from p. 5)



*> **Sue Short**, Archbold, Ohio; *MDiv: Pastoral Ministry*. Sue plans to continue serving on the pastoral ministry team at Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold.



*> **Dirriba Amenu Sori**, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; *MATGA Ethiopia*. Dirriba hopes to apply his seminary experiences in his ministry as Regional Director for Meserete Kristos congregations in the eastern part of

Ethiopia. He also plans to pursue a PhD in church leadership or peace studies. His home congregation is Meserete Kristos Church of Dire Dawa.

“As a church leader and pastor, I have gained experience in many areas that are fundamental for my ministry. — Dirriba Amenu Sori



*> **Megan Patrice Wiebersch**, Des Moines, Iowa; *MDiv: Chaplaincy*. Megan plans to continue in a chaplain residency program through August and then work towards Board of

Chaplaincy Certification through the Association of Professional Chaplains. Her home congregation is Washington (Iowa) Mennonite Church.



Talashia Keim Yoder, Goshen, Indiana; *MACF*. Talashia plans to continue as Pastor of Christian Formation and Worship at College Mennonite Church in Goshen and as Theater Director at Bethany

Christian Schools in Goshen. She also creates intergenerational seasonal resources for Mennonite Church USA and writes for Building Faith, a website ministry of Mennonite Early Childhood Network.



* **Jonathon Wesley Zirkle**, Knightstown and Goshen, Indiana; *MACF*. Jon feels called to support the spiritual lives and holistic wellness of men through involvement with Mennonite Men and beyond,

and plans to offer individual spiritual direction. He serves as Director of Bushelcraft Farm in Elkhart and works with Wood-Land-Lakes, a nonprofit land trust in Indiana. His home congregations are Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen and Southside Fellowship in Elkhart. •

Seminary encouraged me to understand my embedded theology and beliefs that continue to impact my life, along with ways my deliberative theology continues to be life-giving. — Megan Wiebersch

The Class of 2024

Graduates by degree

- 4 MA in Christian Formation
- 6 MA: Theology and Global Anabaptism (*see also* p. 2)
- 1 MA: Theology and Peace Studies
- 6 Master of Divinity
- 1* Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction
- 4 Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies

* First graduate to earn this certificate; the program began in 2022.

Graduates by ministry

- 9 serving in pastoral ministry roles
- 5 pursuing or seeking to pursue further graduate studies
- 4 serving in a church organization or institution
- 4 serving in mission or evangelism

- 3 serving in education
- 2 offering spiritual direction
- 2 seeking work in a ministry, education or nonprofit setting
- 1 seeking chaplaincy certification
- 1 creating resources for worship and faith formation
- 1 serving in an Optional Practical Training assignment
- 1 working with anti-racism organizing and education
- 1 working in farming and land trust management
- 1 working in the medical field

(Some graduates are involved in multiple roles.)

Graduates by demographic

- 13 women
- 9 men
- 4 countries represented — Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, United States

- 16 graduates who completed part or all of their seminary studies at a distance
- 5 graduates who lived on campus for at least part of their studies
- 8 graduates who previously earned graduate degrees from other schools
- 11 graduates affiliated with Mennonite Church USA
- 6 graduates affiliated with the Meserete Kristos Church (Ethiopian Mennonite Church)
- 8 (one each) graduates affiliated with the Baptist Church, Brethren in Christ U.S., Christian Reformed Church, Evana Network, LMC – A Fellowship of Anabaptist Churches, Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo, United Church of Christ and a nondenominational church

(Some graduates are connected with multiple denominations.)

Faculty teach in-person courses in Ethiopia



(Credit: Dirriba Amenu Sor)

In May and June, 30 Ethiopian students in AMBS's **Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism (MATGA)** program met at **Meserete Kristos Seminary (MKS: Ethiopian Mennonite Seminary)** in Bishoftu/Debre Zeit to take courses in person as part of their studies.

Courses included the MATGA Seminar with **Drew Strait**, PhD; Introduction to Peace Studies and Nonviolence with **Joe Liechty**, PhD; Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture with **Paul Keim**, PhD, and **Yimenu Adimass Belaya**, PhD candidate and MKS Academic Dean; and Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations with **Jacqueline Hoover**, MA.

The MATGA Ethiopia is a customized degree program created in 2019 by MKS and AMBS leaders to educate leaders for the Meserete Kristos (MK) Church — with an emphasis on peace studies. Students take both online semester-long courses and in-person intensive courses adapted for the Ethiopian context and taught by AMBS professors.

Additionally, Strait led a workshop May 9–11 at West Dire Dawa MK Church on Christian leadership and challenging polarization and violent extremism with the gospel of peace. It was organized by the MK Eastern Region Office for Pastors and Leaders Training in collaboration with AMBS. •
— *Annette Brill Bergstresser*

Above left: More than 80 leaders of churches and home cells in the MK Eastern Region attended Drew Strait's workshop. Above right: Strait (at right) teaches with the aid of interpreter Birihanu Tesema Yimer.

(Photo provided)

Anabaptist Witness | April 2024 Mission and Peace in Ethiopia

The articles in *Anabaptist Witness* 11.1 — guest edited by **Henok T. Mekonin**, MA, and **James R. Krabill**, PhD, Interim Managing Editor — appear in two sections. The first focuses on mission and peace efforts in the broader context of the Ethiopian nation, and the second focuses on **Meserete Kristos Church (MKC)** history and perspectives. Most of the writers are Ethiopian Mennonites. The editors hope the pieces will contribute to the sharing of gifts for mutual growth among Anabaptist-Mennonite churches across the globe,

also in the lead-up to the **2028 Mennonite World Conference Assembly** in Ethiopia.

Proceeds from the print edition — available on Amazon — will support MKC programs. The free online version will be available in November. Learn more and buy a print copy at anabaptistwitness.org.

AW is a publication of AMBS, Mennonite Central Committee (U.S. and Canada), Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Mission Network. •



(l. to r.): Pastor Kebede Bekere, consultant and MKC member, and Pastor Desalegn Abebe, MKC President, pose with the issue.

Employee transitions

The AMBS learning community has marked the following transitions in 2024 (pictured l. to r.):

- **Linda Metzler** ended her time as Caterer in Residence in late March after 20 years of service.
- **Kaylena Chupp** of New Paris, Indiana, began as Caterer in Residence on March 19.
- **Grant Miller** (MDiv 2019) of Kalamazoo, Michigan, began May 15 as half-time Development Associate, working remotely.



(Credit: David Fisher Fast)

Are you a lay leader or church participant?

AMBS exists to serve the church! We're here to serve you and your congregation with these offerings:

Practical Leadership Training modules

Select short-term online modules to suit your interests:

- Moving through Congregational Changes
- Living Outside the "Man Box"
- Leadership Practices for Spiritual Vitality
- Leading Engaging Weddings and Funerals
- Women and Power in the Church
- Funding Congregational Ministry after COVID-19
- Seeking Repair with Indigenous Communities

ambs.edu/plt

Invite AMBS

Invite a faculty member to speak in person or virtually on confes-

sional Bible study, intercultural competence, trauma-informed caregiving, nonviolent communication, and more.

ambs.edu/invite

Online Short Courses

Dig into Anabaptist theology, history and practice in our six-week discussion-based noncredit courses. No grades, no papers!

- Exploring Peace and Justice in the Bible
- Exploring Anabaptist History and Theology
- Resisting Christian Nationalism with the Gospel of Peace
- Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture
- Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication

ambs.edu/short-courses

Pastors & Leaders 2025

Annual conference to resource church leaders: Feb. 17–20
ambs.edu/pastors-and-leaders



Jackie Wyse-Rhodes, PhD, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible, enjoys exploring Scripture with groups.

Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

Grow in leadership, spiritual practices, Anabaptist theology and ministry through this distance-friendly undergraduate-level program.

ambs.edu/journey

Graduate studies

Deepen your faith and biblical and theological understanding through our master's programs and customizable Graduate Certificate in Theology. AMBS offers generous need-based financial aid, scholarships and matching grants. Test the waters by trying out a course; see our discount for non-admitted students!

ambs.edu/upcoming-courses

"Trinity House" now available for retreat use

A distinctive cloverleaf-shaped house on the edge of the AMBS campus is now available to the public for use as a daytime retreat space. Formerly known as "Poustinia House," it was the home of **Clarence Bauman**, a former professor of ethics at AMBS, and **Alice Bauman**, his spouse. Clarence designed the space to be a hermitage — a place "set apart" for solitude, contemplation and prayer in the tradition of Russian spirituality. ("Poustinia" is Russian for "desert.") For more information and current rates, see ambs.edu/trinity. •

(Credit: Rachel A. Fonseca, Janeen Bertsche Johnson)

